CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. An e-mail system for use by a passenger in a vehicle, said passenger having access to a terminal, the e-mail system comprising:

a first server located on said vehicle, wherein said first server is configured to transport e-mail between said first server and said terminal;

a second server external to said vehicle, wherein said second server is configured to transport e-mail between said second server and a data network; and

a communications system configured to wirelessly transfer e-mail between said first server and said second server.

2. The e-mail system of claim 1 wherein:

said communications system is configured to deliver an e-mail offer to said terminal; and

said communications system is configured to selectively transfer e-mail messages to said first server based upon requests from said passenger in response to said e-mail offer.

3. The e-mail system of claim 2 wherein said e-mail offer comprises a subject header identifying an e-mail available for upload, an indication of who sent said e-mail, and a price for delivering said e-mail to said terminal.

4. The e-mail system of claim 1 wherein:

said terminal is a laptop computer configured with information identifying a home e-mail server;

said communications system is further configured to route e-mail to and from said laptop computer through said first server regardless of said laptop computer configuration; and

said first server emulates said home e-mail server.

5. The e-mail system of claim 4 wherein said second server is configured to periodically poll said home e-mail server for inbox messages.

6. The e-mail system of claim 4 wherein said second server is configured to receive e-mail forwarded from said home e-mail server.

7. The e-mail system of claim 4 wherein:
said communications system is configured to deliver an e-mail offer to said terminal; and
said communications system is configured to selectively transfer e-mail messages to said first server based upon requests from said passenger in response to said e-mail offer.

8. The e-mail system of claim 1 wherein said communications system comprises a first communication device for providing a first wireless communication mode between said first server and said second server.

9. The e-mail system of claim 8 wherein said communications system comprises a second communication device for providing a second wireless communication mode between said first server and said second server.

10. The e-mail system of claim 9 wherein:
said communications system further comprises a mode selector configured to select a wireless communication mode from said first and second wireless communication modes based on mode selection criteria; and
said communication system is further configured to initiate said selected wireless communication mode to transfer an e-mail message.

11. The e-mail system of claim 10 wherein said mode selection criteria comprises an increase data throughput.

12. The e-mail system of claim 10 wherein said mode selection criteria comprises an urgency of transferring an e-mail message.

13. The e-mail system of claim 10 wherein said mode selection criteria comprises a transmission cost associated with said wireless communication mode.

14. The e-mail system of claim 10 wherein said mode selection criteria comprises an amount a user is willing to pay.

15. The e-mail system of claim 10 wherein said mode selection criteria comprises a time since a last transfer of data.

16. The e-mail system of claim 10 further configured to determine when to initiate said communication modes, and configured to place e-mail data in a queue to be sent and received in batches.

17. The e-mail system of claim 16 wherein said mode selection criteria comprises the current amount of data accumulated in the queue.

18. The e-mail system of claim 10 wherein said wireless communication mode is gatelink.

19. The e-mail system of claim 10 wherein said wireless communication mode is radio frequency based.

20. The e-mail system of claim 10 wherein said wireless communication mode is satellite based.

21. The e-mail system of claim 10 wherein said wireless communication mode transfers compressed data.

22. The e-mail system of claim 10 wherein said wireless communication mode transfers encrypted data.

23. The e-mail system of claim 1 further comprising a vehicle data network configured to transport an e-mail message between said terminal and said first server.

24. The e-mail system of claim 23 where in said vehicle data network comprises a world wide web server.

25. The e-mail system of claim 23 where in said vehicle data network comprises an e-mail server emulating an e-mail server identified by said passenger.

26. The e-mail system of claim 1 wherein said terminal communicates with said first server via a modem interface unit.

27. The e-mail system of claim 1 wherein said terminal communicates with said first server via an in-flight entertainment system.

28. The e-mail system of claim 1 wherein said terminal communicates with said first server via a wireless interface unit.

29. The e-mail system of claim 2 wherein said terminal comprises a kiosk.

30. The e-mail system of claim 2 wherein said terminal comprises a laptop computer.

31. The e-mail system of claim 2 wherein said terminal comprises a keyboard.

32. The e-mail system of claim 2 wherein said terminal comprises a palm pilot.

33. The e-mail system of claim 2 wherein said second server is further configured to provide e-mail accounts for said users.

34. The e-mail system of claim 2 wherein said vehicle is an airplane.

35. A method of transporting e-mail messages between a data network and a terminal on a vehicle, the method comprising the steps of:

transporting a message between a terminal on said vehicle and a first server on said vehicle;

establishing a data connection between said first server and a second server, wherein said second server is located external to said vehicle;

transporting e-mail between said first server and said second server via a wireless connection;

transporting e-mail between said second server and a data network.

36. The method of claim 35 wherein said establishing step further comprises the step of selecting a communication mode for said data connection; wherein said selecting is based on selection criteria.

37. The method of claim 36 wherein said selecting step further comprises the step of providing a first communication device with a first communication mode.

38. The method of claim 37 wherein said selecting step further comprises the step of providing a second communication device with a second communication mode.

39. The method of claim 38 wherein:

said selecting step further comprises the step of selecting a wireless communication mode from said first and second wireless communication modes based on mode selection criteria; and

said establishing step further comprises the step of initiating said selected wireless communication mode.

40. The method of claim 39 wherein said selection mode criteria comprises reducing cost and increasing data throughput.

41. The method of claim 39 wherein said selection criteria is an urgency of the message.

42. The method of claim 39 wherein said selection criteria is an amount of data accumulated in the queue.

43. The method of claim 39 wherein said selection criteria is a cost of said wireless communication mode.

44. The method of claim 39 wherein said selection criteria is an amount said user is willing to pay.

45. The method of claim 39 wherein said selection criteria is a time since last communication.

46. The method of claim 39 wherein said establishing step further comprises the step of determining when to initiate said communication mode.

47. The method of claim 39 wherein said establishing step further comprises the step of queuing data for sending and receiving in batches.

48. The method of claim 35 wherein said step transporting e-mail between said second server and a data network further comprises an e-mail retrieval step wherein an e-mail message is transmitted to said second server.

49. The method of claim 48 wherein said e-mail retrieval step further comprises the step of polling a home e-mail server by said second server and retrieving said e-mail message from said home e-mail service.

50. The method of claim 48 wherein said e-mail retrieval step further comprises said second server receiving e-mail forwarded from a home e-mail server.

51. The method of claim 48 further comprising the step of establishing an e-mail account for said user.

52. The method of claim 51 further comprising the step of receiving an e-mail message sent to said e-mail account.

53. The method of claim 48 wherein said step of transporting e-mail between said second server and said first server further comprises:

the step of providing an e-mail offer to said terminal;

he step of receiving a request to upload a selected e-mail message; and

the step of providing said requested e-mail message to said terminal.

54. The method of claim 53 wherein said step of providing said e-mail offer further comprises the step of providing a subject header identifying an e-mail available for upload, an indication of who sent said e-mail, and a price for delivering said e-mail to said terminal.

55. The method of claim 39 wherein said wireless communication mode is gatelink.

56. The method of claim 39 wherein said wireless communication mode is radio based.

57. The method of claim 39 wherein said wireless communication mode is satellite based.

58. The method of claim 39 wherein said wireless communication is compressed.

59. The method of claim 39 wherein said wireless communication is encrypted.

60. The method of claim 35 further comprising the steps of:

said first server receiving information identifying a home e-mail server from said terminal, wherein said terminal is a laptop computer;

directing said laptop to said first server regardless of said identifying information; and

said first server emulating said home e-mail server.

61. The method of claim 35 wherein said step of transporting a message between said terminal and said first server further comprises transporting said message via a vehicle data network comprising a world wide web server.

62. The method of claim 35 wherein said step of transporting a message between said terminal and said first server further comprises transporting said message via a vehicle data network comprising an e-mail server emulating an e-mail server identified by said terminal.

63. The method of claim 35 further comprising the step of communicating between said terminal and said first server via at least one of the following: a modem interface unit, an in-flight entertainment system, a wireless interface unit; and a kiosk.

64. A digital storage medium having computer-executable instructions stored thereon, wherein said computer-executable instructions are operable to execute the method of claim 39.

65. A digital storage medium having computer-executable instructions stored thereon, wherein said computer-executable instructions are operable to execute the method of claim 53.

66. A digital storage medium having computer-executable instructions stored thereon, wherein said computer-executable instructions are operable to execute the method of claim 60.